

David G. Smith
Forestry and Wildlife Administrator
State of Hawaii
Department of Land and Natural Resources
Division of Forestry and Wildlife

Regarding questions from Representative Gregorio Sablan:

I spoke in my testimony specifically about Hawaii because that is where I am most familiar, but I agree that issues with threatened and endangered species management, and management of native species generally, includes islands throughout the Pacific.

Why is it important to conserve Pacific Island plants?

Pacific Islands are geographically remote, and as such, many of the plants and animals found on these islands evolved in relative isolation, and are unique to specific regions or islands. Modern transportation systems have greatly accelerated the pace at which species are being introduced to these islands, and as such, native species are under considerable threat from competition. It is critical to protect and conserve the remaining species unique to the Pacific to conserve our natural and cultural heritage.

While these treasures belong to all people of the United States of America, they have special significance to native Hawaiian and Pacific Island cultures. Pacific Island cultures are inseparable from the native species and ecosystems that have sustained and shaped every aspect of their culture. Healthy ecosystems and sustainable populations of native plants and animals are vitally important to the people, cultures, and economies of the Pacific.

How do you see those funds being utilized to help recover plant species in the Northern Marianas?

- 1) Development and implementation of management plans. Some of this planning has already been done, so added capacity in personnel and funding could be applied immediately.
- 2) Onsite monitoring of populations, ecosystems, reproduction and species' level population trends through existing land management agencies and private landowner assistance.
- 3) Enhanced enforcement of conservation laws through existing law enforcement authorities; and
- 4) Community outreach and education to build public understanding and awareness.

Additional personnel and operating funds are needed to provide the protection and enhancement to recover endangered species, and to manage rare species so they do not reach the point of having to be listed.

Regarding questions from Representative Jeff Van Drew:

How much could coastal districts who rely heavily on healthy habitat to support fisheries and other wildlife for birdwatching, recreation, fishing, and tourism stand to lose economically should wetlands continue to be lost?

It is no accident that river valleys and coastal plains with abundant wetlands have been the focus of human civilisations for millennia – and that these wetland systems, with their rich natural resources, have been critical to the development and survival of humanity. Our advancing technological skills may sometimes be portrayed as enabling us to ‘conquer’ and control nature, but recent environmental catastrophes – floods, landslides, storms, many with their roots in unsustainable use of land and water – suggest otherwise. The reality is that we still depend on properly functioning ecosystems to sustain us. Wetland ecosystems are part of our natural wealth. At a worldwide scale they provide us with services worth trillions of US dollars every year – entirely free of charge – making a vital contribution to human health and well-being. With the global population set to increase to nine billion by 2050, increasing pressure on water resources and the threats posed by climate change, the need to maximise these benefits has never been greater or more urgent. The benefits provided by wetlands include: 1) flood control; 2) groundwater replenishment; 3) shoreline stabilisation and storm protection; 4) sediment and nutrient retention and export; 5) water purification; 6) reservoirs of biodiversity; 7) wetland products; 8) cultural values; 9) recreation and tourism; and 10) climate change mitigation and adaptation.

How do wetlands benefit hunters and fishers?

Wetlands have very high biological productivity and diversity, and provide habitat for many species of sportfish and wildlife. Waterfowl are particularly dependant on healthy wetland ecosystems; almost all fish species are highly dependant on the habitat and environmental benefits provided by wetlands; and most “upland” game species derive benefits from the habitat and resources of wetlands.

How will the \$18 million increase in annual appropriated funds further wetland conservation?

Funds for wetland protection and management can be used in any of the following ways:

- Land acquisition and protection;
- Planning;
- Restoration of wetlands;
- Enhancement of healthy wetland function;
- Active management to protect species from harmful outside forces;
- Law enforcement;
- Education.